



The Logic of Evil: The Social Origins of the Nazi Party, 1925-1933

By Professor William Brustein

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Why did millions of apparently sane, rational Germans support the Nazi Party between 1925 and 1933? In this provocative book, William Brustein argues that the Nazi Party's emergence as the most popular political party in Germany was eminently logical and was largely a result of its success at fashioning economic programs that addressed the material needs of a wide range of German citizens. Brustein has carefully analyzed a huge collection of pre-1933 Nazi Party membership data drawn from the official files at the Berlin Document Center. He argues that Nazi followers were more representative of German society as a whole - that they included more workers, more single women, and more Catholics - than most previous scholars have believed. Further, says Brustein, the patterns of membership reveal that people joined the Nazi Party not because of Hitler's irrational appeal or charisma or anti-Semitism but because the party, through its shrewd and proactive program, offered more benefits to more people than did the other political parties in Weimar Germany. According to Brustein, Nazi supporters were no different from citizens anywhere who select a political party or candidate they believe will promote their economic interests. The roots of evil, he suggests, may be ordinary indeed.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

How the Nazi party found roots and then flourished out of an educated, modern society is a question that haunts the 20th century. In *The Logic of Evil*, William Brustein, a sociology professor at the University of Minnesota, offers an intriguing argument: the citizens of Germany who supported the Nazis were motivated by economic self-interest. He says the Nazis' popularity increased because of their "superlative success at fashioning economic programs that addressed the material needs of millions of Germans." Brustein provides impressive evidence to back his thesis; he and a research team went through the files of 42,000 Nazi party members and found a disproportionate number in occupations who benefited from the Nazis' economic programs. His is an argument that deserves serious merit, particularly given the blatant economic appeals some current leaders make to their constituencies.

From Library Journal

Brustein (sociology, Univ. of Minnesota) uses 42,004 observations of members from the Nazi Party master file for this academic examination of the social origins of the party prior to 1933 and why members joined. Richard Hamilton's *Who Voted for Hitler* (Princeton Pr., 1982) and Thomas Childer's *The Nazi Voter* (Univ. of North Carolina, 1983) have examined why Germans voted for the Nazi Party, but Brustein's use of such a massive database brings out new interpretations that will cause some debate. In a reasoned narrative, Brustein notes that most Nazi followers were motivated chiefly by commonplace and rational factors rather than by Hitler's appeal or charisma. In other words, they voted their pocketbooks. Are the Germans of 1933 guilty of letting loose a great evil because they did not see the ramifications of thinking only of their pocketbooks, and should they have anticipated what was to come? Brustein answers no to both questions. His important book should be on the shelves of all academic libraries and all public libraries with a strong Holocaust collection. ?Dennis L. Noble, Sequim, Wash.
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Brustein is a "rational-choice" sociologist: his "model of political behavior [assumes] political affiliation is based on self-interest." Here he analyzes *who* joined the Nazi Party between 1925 and 1933 and *why* specific planks in the party's program might have appealed to particular segments of Germany's middle and working classes. Brustein challenges four common explanations of Nazi Party growth (irrationalist appeals, lower-middle-class reaction, political confessionism, and catchall party of protest), based on the large sample (40,000) extracted in 1989 from the party master file in Berlin. Brustein reviews the positions of the Weimar period's competing political parties, then demonstrates that many of the groups whose interests best matched key Nazi positions were overrepresented among early party members. Brustein's utilitarian model may strike some readers as mechanical, and he takes Nazi Party programs more seriously than some other scholars, but the work offers enough new information to be appropriate for larger European history collections. *Mary Carroll*

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